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COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES

# RESOLUTIONS, GUIDELINES AND REGULATIONS ON THE USE OF CONFERENCE-SERVICING RESOURCES AND CONTROL AND LIMITATION OF DOCUMENTATION

Note by the Secretary-General

## INTRODUCTION

1. In section A, paragraph 5, of its resolution 47/202 of 22 December 1992, the General Assembly requested the Secretariat to bring to the attention of all organs the relevant Assembly resolutions and guidelines on the use of conference-servicing resources, and information on the notional costs per hour of meeting time. In section B, paragraph 10, of the resolution, the Assembly further requested the Secretariat to bring to the attention of all organs and the substantive offices concerned the relevant Assembly resolutions, rules and regulations on control and limitation of documentation, including the guidelines for drafting reports as contained in resolution 37/14 C of 16 November 1992 and information on the notional cost per page of documentation. The present note, which takes into account policy decisions adopted by the General Assembly up to the end of 1992, is being distributed to all Member States as an Assembly information document and will also be made available at the opening of each session of a United Nations organ.

## I. USE OF CONFERENCE-SERVICING RESOURCES

2. In paragraph 6 of its resolution 45/238 A of 21 December 1990, the General Assembly invited United Nations bodies, in making requests for conference services in accordance with their respective mandates, to ensure that the conference services requested were sufficient to enable them to carry out their tasks fully and that they matched, to the extent possible, their actual requirements. In paragraph 7, the Assembly urged all United Nations organs and bodies to intensify their efforts to improve their utilization of requested conference-servicing resources.

3. In paragraph 6 of its resolution 47/202 A, the General Assembly urged all the subsidiary bodies of the Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council to comply with the request of the Assembly contained in paragraph 11 of its

resolution 46/190 of 20 December 1991 to undertake informal consultations on a regular basis for the purpose of improving the utilization of their conference-servicing resources.

## II. PERIODICITY AND DURATION OF SESSIONS

4. The periodicity of sessions of United Nations organs and subsidiary bodies is laid down in their respective rules of procedure and legislation. In some cases, upon the establishment of a subsidiary, the parent body may decide how often the new organ will convene.

5. The duration of sessions of organs and subsidiary bodies, as appropriate, is similarly laid down in their respective legislation or decided by the parent body upon the establishment of a subsidiary.

6. In its resolution 33/55 of 14 December 1978, the General Assembly approved the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences in its report. 1/ The Committee recommended that United Nations bodies be requested to review the length and cycle of their sessions with a view to exploring the possibilities of shortening them and of meeting on a biennial basis, or less frequently; the findings should be taken into account by the Committee on Conferences when establishing future calendars of conferences (recommendation 1).

7. The Committee also recommended that the length of a future session of a body should be examined by the Committee on Conferences in consultation with the body concerned, on the basis of experience in the use of the allocated meeting time during its preceding session or sessions, in order to reduce the wastage of time and resources at United Nations meetings (recommendation 2).

8. In paragraph 3 of its resolution 47/202 A, the General Assembly urged all subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council to seek the technical advice of the Office of Conference Services on the availability of conference-servicing facilities and resources in the process of the determination and adjustment of the dates and periodicity of their sessions, in order to enhance planning and optimize utilization of conference-servicing resources. In paragraph 4, the Assembly urged all United Nations organs to utilize the conference-servicing resources allocated to them in the most efficient and cost-effective manner and to maximize the accuracy with which they forecast the number of fully serviced meetings.

9. In paragraph 13 of its resolution 47/202 B, the Assembly appealed to intergovernmental bodies to make active use of the report on the state of preparation of pre-session documentation when reviewing the organizational arrangements for substantive sessions.

10. In paragraph 5 of its resolution 43/222 A of 21 December 1988, the Assembly urged those United Nations organs which had failed to make adequate use of the conference-servicing resources provided to them to consider reducing the number of meetings they requested in their future programmes of work.

## III. VENUES

11. The basic rule governing the venues of meetings of United Nations organs and subsidiary bodies is contained in General Assembly resolution 40/243 of 18 December 1985. In paragraph 4 of that resolution, the Assembly reaffirmed the general principle that, in drawing up the schedule of conferences and meetings, United Nations bodies should plan to meet at their respective established headquarters, with the following exceptions: the Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme; the sessions of the International Law Commission; the sessions of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law; the second regular session of the Economic and Social Council (subsequently amended by resolution 45/264 of 13 May 1991); the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council; the regular sessions of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic Commission for Africa and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, as well as meetings of their subsidiary bodies; the International Civil Service Commission; the sessions of the Legal Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space; and the Conference on Disarmament.

12. In paragraph 5 of the resolution, the Assembly decided that United Nations bodies might hold sessions away from their established headquarters when a Government issuing an invitation for a session to be held within its territory had agreed to defray the actual additional costs directly or indirectly involved.

13. In paragraph 7 of the resolution, the Assembly decided that no subsidiary organ might meet at United Nations Headquarters during a regular session of the Assembly unless explicitly authorized by the Assembly.

14. Provisions concerning venues are also contained in the rules of procedure of United Nations organs and in other General Assembly legislation (for example, resolution 45/264, annex). Resolution 47/212 of 23 December 1992 may have implications for the venues of some intergovernmental bodies, and these may need to be included in a future resolution on the pattern of conferences.

## IV. LANGUAGES

15. In paragraph 4 of its resolution 42/207 C of 11 December 1987, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to take the necessary measures to ensure the provision of conference services to the United Nations with adequate personnel, with due respect for the equal treatment of all official languages of the Organization. Specific provisions concerning official and working languages and other language-related matters are contained in the rules of procedure of the respective organs.

## V. DOCUMENTATION

16. The General Assembly has on numerous occasions adopted resolutions calling for restraint on the part of delegations in requesting reports, studies and meeting records, and has asked the Secretariat to draft documentation as

concisely as possible. The policies stated in those resolutions have, for the most part, applied to the documentation of the General Assembly and of its subsidiary bodies (for example, resolutions 37/14 of 16 November 1982 and 45/238 of 21 December 1990). However, the Assembly has invited other United Nations organs, in particular the Economic and Social Council, and such subsidiary bodies as the Trade and Development Board, to apply the same policies to their own documentation and to that of their subsidiary bodies. The specific recommendations contained in those resolutions that remain in effect are set forth in paragraphs 5-15 of document A/INF/48/1.

17. In addition to the numerous calls to reduce and streamline documentation, the General Assembly has appealed to Member States to exercise restraint in their requests for the circulation of communications (for example, paragraph 1 of resolution 47/202 B). Moreover, in section II, paragraph 2, of its resolution 33/56 of 14 December 1978, it requested the Secretary-General, inter alia, to: follow the necessary administrative and managerial procedures to ensure the scheduling, preparation and submission of documents in good time; take measures to ensure that pre-session documents for meetings were distributed not less than six weeks before the meetings, in all languages; and continue to apply to all action-oriented documents prepared by the Secretariat for intergovernmental meetings a limit of 32 pages, in accordance with internal instructions of the Secretariat (the limit was later fixed at 24 pages in accordance with ST/AI/189/Add.20/Rev.1 of 24 February 1982).

18. In paragraph 12 of its resolution 47/202 B, the Assembly urged subsidiary organs to review their agendas with a view to enabling the Secretariat to comply with the six-week rule, inter alia, through combining agenda items and limiting requests for pre-session documentation.

19. With regard to written records, in paragraph 5 of the above resolution the Assembly urged those bodies that received summary records and whose reports exceeded the 32-page limit to consider relinquishing their entitlement to summary records. In paragraph 6, it urged those bodies to consider relinquishing their entitlement to summary records when drafting was being undertaken in formal session and duly recorded in the report. In paragraph 16, the Assembly decided that, at its forty-ninth session, there should be a comprehensive review of, inter alia, the need for, usefulness and timely issuance of verbatim and summary records, on the basis of a report submitted by the Secretary-General through the Committee on Conferences and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

## A. General Assembly

20. Provisions concerning the written records and sound recordings of the meetings of the General Assembly and of the Main Committees and other subsidiary bodies of the Assembly are contained in the rules of procedure of the General Assembly.

21. In paragraph 2 of its resolution 3415 (XXX) of 8 December 1975, the General Assembly endorsed a number of criteria that had been proposed by the Secretary-General concerning the provision of records of the proceedings of the bodies and organs of the United Nations. The main criterion was that records

should continue to be provided to the principal organs of the Organization, but in respect of subsidiary organs of the General Assembly a more limited and selective approach should be encouraged. The pattern of meeting record entitlements currently in force is provided in annex I to document A/INF/48/1.

22. By paragraph 7 of resolution 37/14 C, the subsidiary organs entitled to meeting records were requested to keep their requirements to a reasonable minimum, to dispense with them whenever possible and to make wider use of sound recordings.

23. By paragraph 2 of resolution 45/238 B, the General Assembly decided that no subsidiary organ of the Assembly would be entitled to summary records, with the exception of the following: Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean; Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; International Law Commission; Legal Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space; Special Committee against Apartheid; and United Nations Commission on International Trade Law.

24. In paragraph 3 of the same resolution, the Assembly decided that summary records should continue to be provided to regular and special sessions of the following governing bodies: Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund, Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Governing Council of the United Nations Development Programme.

25. In resolution 37/14 C, the General Assembly confirmed the entitlement of the following subsidiary organs to verbatim records and reiterated that no other organs would be so entitled in the absence of an explicit resolution by the Assembly to that effect: Committee on Applications for Review of Administrative Tribunal Judgements; Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space; Disarmament Commission; Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples; Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Population of the Occupied Territories (when hearing witnesses); United Nations Administrative Tribunal (when holding hearings, only in the language of the speaker); Committee (now Conference) on Disarmament (from full statements as delivered and checked by the delegations concerned but without the use of verbatim reporters); and subsidiary organs of the General Assembly when holding meetings in observance of international days of solidarity proclaimed by the Assembly.

## B. Economic and Social Council

26. Provisions concerning the written records and sound recordings of the meetings of the Council and of its subsidiary organs are contained in the rules of procedure of the Council.

27. By its decision 1992/288 of 30 July 1992, the Council decided to discontinue, from 1993, summary records for its sessional committees, the regional commissions and the following other subsidiary bodies: Commission for Social Development; Commission on the Status of Women; Commission on Narcotic Drugs; Commission on Science and Technology for Development; Commission on Crime

Prevention and Criminal Justice; Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations; Committee on Natural Resources; Committee for Programme and Coordination; Commission on Transnational Corporations; and Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development.

### C. Trusteeship Council

28. The provisions concerning the official records of the Trusteeship Council are contained in the rules of procedure of that organ.

### D. Security Council

29. The provisions concerning the official records of the Security Council are contained in the provisional rules of procedure of that organ.

## VI. GUIDELINES ON THE FORMAT AND CONTENT OF REPORTS OF SUBSIDIARY BODIES

30. In paragraph 12 of its resolution 37/14 C, the General Assembly urged all its subsidiary organs not entitled to written meeting records to observe more widely the following guidelines on the format and contents of their reports, which were aimed at fostering the clear and succinct presentation of such information which the Assembly needed for a meaningful review of the work of its subsidiary organs and for taking action on their recommendations, by confining the contents of such reports to:

(a) Draft resolutions and draft decisions recommended for adoption by the General Assembly with, as necessary, concise statements supporting or opposing the recommendations;

(b) Matters meriting the special attention of the Assembly;

(c) Details of voting, where appropriate;

(d) Decisions relevant to the subsidiary organ's own activities and procedures, which do not require action by the Assembly;

(e) Organization of work and, where applicable, brief mention of opening statements.

31. In paragraph 13 of the resolution, the Assembly also requested those subsidiary organs that received written meeting records to avoid including summaries of discussions in their reports, unless such summaries were indispensable as part of the elements referred to in paragraphs 30 (a), (b) and (d) above, by referring instead to the relevant meeting records.

32. Moreover, in section I, paragraph 4 of its resolution 33/56, the General Assembly reaffirmed that the reports of its subsidiary bodies should not include as annexes material such as verbatim or summary records, working papers or

extracts therefrom or any texts already available in easily accessible documents.

## VII. GUIDELINES FOR SPECIAL CONFERENCES

### A. General Assembly resolution 40/243

33. In paragraph 10 of resolution 40/243, the General Assembly laid down the principle that no more than one special conference of the United Nations should be convened at the same time and that in any given year, no more than five special conferences should be convened, unless the Assembly specifically decided otherwise.

### B. General Assembly resolution 35/10 C

34. In the annex to its resolution 35/10 C of 3 November 1980, the General Assembly laid down guidelines on the preparation, organization and servicing arrangements of special conferences of the United Nations and their preparatory meetings.

### C. General Assembly resolution 36/117 D

35. In the annex to its resolution 36/117 D of 10 December 1981, the General Assembly laid down guidelines for the control and limitation of documentation for special conferences of the United Nations.

### D. General Assembly resolution 37/14 B

36. In the annex to its resolution 37/14 B the General Assembly established guidelines on Secretariat organization for United Nations special conferences.

## VIII. GUIDELINES FOR REDUCING THE WASTAGE RESULTING FROM CANCELLATION OF SCHEDULED MEETINGS

37. In section IV of its resolution 32/71 of 9 December 1977, the General Assembly set forth guidelines for reducing the wastage resulting from cancellation of scheduled meetings.

38. The substantive secretariat of each body should circulate to the members before the first meeting of each session a draft agenda and timetable for the completion of consideration of items, taking into account the availability of documentation. Moreover, the programme for each meeting should include more than one agenda item so that, if consideration of an item was interrupted or completed, the members might pass on to another item.

39. In order that delegations might initiate substantive discussion at the first meeting, after the organization of work, committee secretaries should consult with delegations before the opening of the session to ascertain whether

some representatives would be prepared to speak on the first substantive item at the opening meeting. As was the practice of the General Assembly, a list of speakers should be compiled several days in advance of the debate on each item. It would in general be advisable to convene meetings only when there was a sufficient number of speakers to ensure adequate utilization of available resources.

40. The secretariat of each body should make sure that documentation was made available to all members sufficiently in advance of the session to permit proper study of it and, in consultation with the chairman, should schedule meetings only when the documentation had been available for an adequate period. In addition, in planning the requirements for a given session, allowance should be made for at least one day towards the end of the session without meetings so that draft reports, resolutions and decisions could be prepared without interfering with the committee's business.

41. Committee secretaries should identify any possible overlapping in the membership of their committee with that of certain others, particularly those in the same field of activity, with a view to reducing the likelihood of conflicting meeting schedules; the Committee on Conferences, in its own examination of the proposed calendars, should also pay particular attention to that point.

42. The secretary of each body should bring to the attention of members, as appropriate, any resolutions and decisions on the regulation of meetings and conferences, including directives on the allocation and utilization of conference resources. Moreover, he should inform the members, at the beginning of each session, of the conference resources, including the number of meetings and the extent of interpretation services, made available to the body and should give them a brief account, at appropriate intervals during the session, of the use they had been making of those resources.

## IX. INFORMAL MEETINGS

43. Meetings of regional groups, for which the Secretariat provides interpretation services and physical facilities, are not included in the biennial calendar of conferences. In 1976, the Committee on Conferences, in paragraph 82 of its report 2/ concluded that since informal meetings were by definition unplanned and tended to replace scheduled meetings, there was no need to make provision for them in the calendar. The Committee recognized the usefulness of informal meetings, and recommended that the General Assembly should request the Secretariat to continue to provide interpretation services for such meetings on an ad hoc basis as existing resources permitted. The Assembly took note of the Committee's report in resolution 31/140 of 17 December 1976.

44. In its decision 33/417 of 14 December 1978 the General Assembly urged United Nations bodies meeting in scheduled sessions to hold informal organizational meetings as far in advance of scheduled sessions as practicable for the purpose of considering their programme of work and its efficient distribution over the period of scheduled meetings. Moreover, the Assembly decided to request United Nations bodies to keep under constant review the

possibility of conducting their business in informal meetings also, it being understood that that practice could not exclude the provision of necessary interpretation and other services normally provided and that a decision to resort to informal meetings should rest with the delegations to each body concerned.

45. In paragraph 8 of its resolution 40/243, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to provide interpretation services for informal meetings on an ad hoc basis in accordance with established practice.

## X. INTER-SESSIONAL DEPARTURES FROM THE APPROVED CALENDAR OF CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

46. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 43/222 B, the Committee on Conferences was mandated to review inter-sessional departures from the approved calendar of conferences and meetings that had administrative and/or financial implications. Administrative implications of such inter-sessional departures are changes to the calendar that involve the grant of an exception to existing rules or regulations of the General Assembly, or matters of policy that entail significant administrative changes in the calendar of conferences. In conformity with the current procedure and practice, a financial implication is a request for additional resources, and it remains feasible that departures from the calendar could have programme implications, that is, exceptions to existing rules or regulations, without involving the need for an additional appropriation.

47. At its 331st meeting, on 20 August 1991, the Committee on Conferences adopted the following guidelines 3/ for consideration of and action on inter-sessional departures:

(a) The Secretariat would continue to deal with departures that did not have programme budget implications, that is those changes involving the establishment of meeting dates or venue for bodies included in the calendar of conferences as "to be determined", and to inform the Committee of any action thereon;

(b) For inter-sessional departures involving only programme implications:

(i) Requests for inter-sessional departures would be forwarded by the body concerned to the secretariat of the Committee, which would then consult with the Bureau. The request should contain the substantive reasons as well as any relevant legislative authority for the proposed change. In cases where the request was for an additional session, the reason or reasons why the organ concerned had not finished its work during the time allotted to it should also be included. Any requests for extensions beyond four meetings would require the explicit approval of the Committee on Conferences;

(ii) Should the Bureau concur with the proposal, the Chairman would authorize the secretariat to take the necessary action to implement the change, as requested, and a letter would be addressed to all

members of the Committee informing them of the request received and the action taken;

(iii) Alternatively, should the Bureau not be in a position to authorize the proposal, the Chairman, or the secretariat at his request, would notify all members of the Committee by means of a memorandum;

(iv) The communication to the Committee should provide an assessment of the technical feasibility of accommodating the requested change; an indication of the nature of the programme implication, such as the required exception to existing rules or regulations of the Assembly, if any; and an estimate of the incremental costs involved and the potential for absorption;

(v) The memorandum that the Chairman or the secretariat would send to members informing them of the requested exception would contain a deadline for any comments they might wish to make. In the event that approval was forthcoming, the secretariat would initiate the action necessary to implement the proposal as requested. Should any member of the Committee request a meeting on the proposal, that request would be brought to the attention of the Chairman and other members of the Bureau;

(c) For inter-sessional departures having programme implications in the form of the extension of entitlements on a permanent basis, and/or budget implications that would result in the need for any additional appropriation, in conformity with the mandate of the Committee, and the budgetary process in force, the Committee would continue to act in its advisory capacity.

48. With regard to the Economic and Social Council, in its decision 1992/214 of 7 February 1992, the Council decided to grant authority to its Bureau to approve inter-sessional departures from its approved calendar of conferences and meetings in respect of its subsidiary bodies when the Council was not in session and after consultation with the Committee on Conferences.

## XI. NOTIONAL COSTS OF DOCUMENTATION AND MEETING TIME

49. The notional cost of processing a standard page of documentation (330 words, 6 languages, 7,000 printed copies) is as follows:

| | $ |
|---|---|
| Translation/revision | 428 |
| Typing | 141 |
| Reproduction | 98 |
| Distribution | 48 |
| | 715 |

50. The notional conference-servicing costs of one hour of meeting time with various services are as follows:

| | | $ |
|---|---|---|
| (i) | Interpretation and verbatim records in six languages | 5 530 |
| (ii) | Interpretation and summary records in six languages | 4 700 |
| (iii) | Interpretation in six languages and verbatim records in three languages | 3 750 |
| (iv) | Interpretation in six languages and summary records in three languages | 3 300 |
| (v) | Interpretation in six languages and support services only (no written records) | 1 200 |

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-third Session, Supplement No. 32 (A/33/32), vol. I, para. 94.

2/ Ibid., Thirty-first Session, Supplement No. 32 (A/31/32).

3/ Ibid., Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 32 (A/46/32), para. 77.

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